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Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations on the programme evaluation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee (see A/37/38, para. 362). The triennial review determines the extent to which the five recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have been implemented.

The OIOS evaluation recommendations addressed various aspects of the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of OCHA in executing its mandate. At the conclusion of its fifty-third session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination recommended that the General Assembly take note of the OIOS evaluation report. The present triennial review determined that all five recommendations had been implemented. There were also early indications of concrete positive outcomes resulting from the implementation of the recommendations by OCHA.

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Recommendation 1 focuses on clarifying and articulating roles and responsibilities in the emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction work of OCHA, both within the programme itself and in relation to the many other humanitarian partners with which it coordinates. OCHA has implemented both the internal and external dimensions of this recommendation. Internally, it has conducted an evaluation to clarify its broad organizational niche in this area and to define roles and responsibilities across its individual organizational units. Externally, OCHA has worked within the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience to develop the Common Framework for Preparedness, which was endorsed by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Development Group in 2013. There have been preliminary indications of the Common Framework's positive outcomes.

Recommendation 2 addressed the need for OCHA to establish a senior surge deployment mechanism, so as to maximize the timeliness and effectiveness of its response at the immediate onset of an emergency. OCHA implemented this recommendation in 2013 through a combination of initiatives within the programme and in conjunction with its inter-agency partners. All of these mechanisms were reported to have yielded positive results, enhancing the ability of OCHA to quickly mobilize staff of the appropriate technical and leadership calibre to respond to level 3 emergencies. The Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism was seen as providing a clear shared commitment to, and common understanding of, surge deployment needs for level 3 emergencies among Inter-Agency Standing Committee member organizations.

Recommendation 3 addressed the leadership role of OCHA in coordinating the assessment by the humanitarian system of its collective effectiveness in implementing the transformative agenda, the chief humanitarian policy reform initiative undertaken during the period covered by the OIOS evaluation. To implement this recommendation, OCHA spearheaded the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring implementation of the transformative agenda, for collecting relevant data at the country level and for prompting collective action in response to the information received at the country level. OCHA chose not to undertake one optional action suggested under recommendation 3, namely, the completion of an inter-agency evaluation of the transformative agenda, but noted that it had led or supported multiple inter-agency reviews. OCHA claimed that these actions had adequately addressed the main thrust of the recommendation. With a further wave of reform likely to result from the World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in May 2016, however, the aspect of the recommendation associated with inter-agency evaluation has taken on heightened importance as an opportunity for the humanitarian system to learn from the past so as to better shape its collective future.

Recommendation 4 focused on the need for OCHA, as the steward of major financing vehicles for the humanitarian system, to strengthen performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation mechanisms. To implement this recommendation, OCHA issued an overarching framework for country-based pooled funds in 2015, thereby removing the distinction between emergency response funds and common humanitarian funds, and subsequently a policy instruction and an operational handbook for country-based pooled funds. It also rolled out other tools, such as the Grants Management System, a web-based platform and mandatory tool for the management of the entire grant life cycle for all country-based pooled funds in 2014; a Performance Accountability Framework; and numerous initiatives to

support the Framework. OCHA has also provided standard messaging to Central Emergency Response Fund recipient agencies, in the Emergency Relief Coordinator's formal allocation communication to them, concerning their responsibilities with respect to sharing information with the humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator. All of these actions were viewed as having led to positive change — for example, through streamlined processes, clearer guidance and expectations, and strengthened performance reporting.

Recommendation 5 addressed the need for OCHA to work more closely with its partners to improve the modalities for undertaking joint inter-agency evaluations. To implement the recommendation, OCHA proposed and, together with its inter-agency evaluation partners, developed a new modality for these evaluations: the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation. The concept was discussed and agreed to by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 2013, and guidelines were developed by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group in 2014. These guidelines provide a set of standard operating procedures for inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (including triggers, timelines and procedures), methodological approaches, and governance and management arrangements. The guidelines have been utilized in a series of evaluations of humanitarian action to date and, based on lessons learned and good practices emerging from these initial cases, their refinement is planned for 2016. Progress by OCHA on this front was viewed as positive, but concerns were raised over its sustainability, as the OCHA evaluation function continued to be underresourced and lacked sufficient independence within the programme to fulfil its critical role in leading inter-agency evaluations.

While some of these initiatives were under consideration at the time of the OIOS evaluation, key interviewees underlined that the recommendations had provided impetus for further progress. Although a range of positive outcomes has resulted from the implementation of the recommendations, sustained attention will be necessary if measureable longer-term impact is to be achieved.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-third session, in 2013, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the programme evaluation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (E/AC.51/2013/3).

2. The Committee underscored the important work carried out by OCHA in its coordination of humanitarian responses, its fundraising for and management of humanitarian response funds and its provision of support to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, in particular in the implementation of the transformative agenda.[1] The Committee recommended that the General Assembly take note of the OIOS evaluation report (A/68/16, para. 182).

3. The present report is issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations. It examines the current status of implementation of the five recommendations contained in the report, as well as whether the implementation of the recommendations has contributed to programme changes, and, if so, to what extent.

4. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS Issue Track database;

(b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from OCHA on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Interviews conducted in person or by telephone of a purposive sample of 35 senior managers and programme staff, both within OCHA and among its partners.

5. The report incorporates comments received from OCHA during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with OCHA, which provided final comments (see annex). OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation extended by OCHA in the drafting of the present report, and for the time and insights provided by its Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners.

II. Results

6. The mandate of OCHA is to ensure the timely, coherent, coordinated and principled response of the international community to disasters and emergencies and to facilitate the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and sustainable development (see A/70/6 (Sect. 27), para. 27.1). The five recommendations emanating from the OIOS evaluation addressed various aspects of the relevance effectiveness and efficiency of OCHA in executing its mandate.

7. All five recommendations have been implemented, and there is some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting from this. The implementation status of each of the five recommendations is discussed below.

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[1] The transformative agenda consists of a set of concrete actions to transform the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies. It focuses on improving the timeliness and effectiveness of its collective response through stronger leadership, more effective coordination structures and improved accountability. For further information, see https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.

Recommendation 1
Clarifying and articulating the roles and responsibilities in preparedness and disaster risk reduction work

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

> OCHA should work closely with partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and its secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme, in particular, as well as the United Nations Development Group, to further clarify and articulate respective roles and responsibilities among OCHA and its partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee involved in preparedness and disaster risk reduction work.

9. This recommendation addressed the work of OCHA on preparedness and disaster risk reduction. OCHA implemented the recommendation in two ways. First, it undertook an internal evaluation, finalized just prior to the issuance of the OIOS evaluation report in 2013, which sought to assess the past and current preparedness efforts of OCHA at the global, regional and country levels and to identify lessons learned and good practices. The internal evaluation also recommended adjustments and corrections to how OCHA exercises its roles and responsibilities in this area. One recommendation specifically addressed the need for a higher-level policy statement in consultation with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners on the role of OCHA in preparedness.

10. Secondly, taking into account the findings and recommendations of the internal evaluation, OCHA worked within the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, through its Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience,[2] to create a common framework for improved capacity development for emergency preparedness. This initiative resulted in the issuance of the Common Framework for Preparedness, which was endorsed by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Development Group in 2013.[3] The Common Framework was disseminated to humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators in 2014.

11. The Common Framework builds upon the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction definition of preparedness. It also supports the development of preparedness capacity in a more coherent manner, outlining a systematic country-level approach in which the inter-agency humanitarian system collectively assesses capacity and need and uses this assessment to plan appropriately. To that end, the Common Framework outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of all actors, prescribing a systematic approach in which humanitarian and development actors combine their efforts at the country level to jointly support the development of national and local capacity for emergency preparedness, response and recovery. It

[2] The Task Team was established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to implement the preparedness and resilience priorities in 2014 and 2015. It was co-chaired by the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, with the secretariat provided by OCHA. With the reorganization of the subsidiary bodies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience will be discontinued. Successor bodies will implement the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group priorities for 2016-2017.

[3] Available from https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/common_framework_for_preparedness.pdf.

specifically stipulates that resident coordinators will lead and coordinate the response preparedness efforts of United Nations country team members and relevant humanitarian actors in support of national efforts. It further stipulates that humanitarian coordinators, for their part, will lead efforts to improve the response preparedness capacity of national and local authorities and their capacity for working with international organizations.

12. According to OCHA, the Common Framework builds on previous disaster risk reduction efforts, helping to bring all relevant actors together to harmonize their understanding of key concepts, clarify roles and responsibilities and undertake needs assessment, planning and capacity-building activities in conjunction with national authorities. With just over two years since the issuance of the Common Framework, it was premature at the time of the triennial review to measure higher-level outcomes (e.g., improved needs assessments, increased preparedness and disaster risk reduction capacity among national and local authorities) or longer-term impact (e.g., improved response and recovery resulting from enhanced capacity) emanating from these enhancements. A review of its shorter-term effects, however, indicated that common disaster risk management plans had been developed based on the Common Framework initiative, whereas key stakeholders underlined that, in the past, organizations undertook these efforts separately in an uncoordinated fashion. The Task Team for Preparedness and Resilience planned further efforts to disseminate the Common Framework and ensure its implementation in 2015-2016.

13. Recommendation 1 has been implemented. To maximize the longer-term, system-wide impact of this endeavour, OCHA should actively participate in efforts to disseminate and implement the Common Framework further and, together with its Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners, to monitor such dissemination and implementation.

Recommendation 2
Establishing a senior surge deployment mechanism

14. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

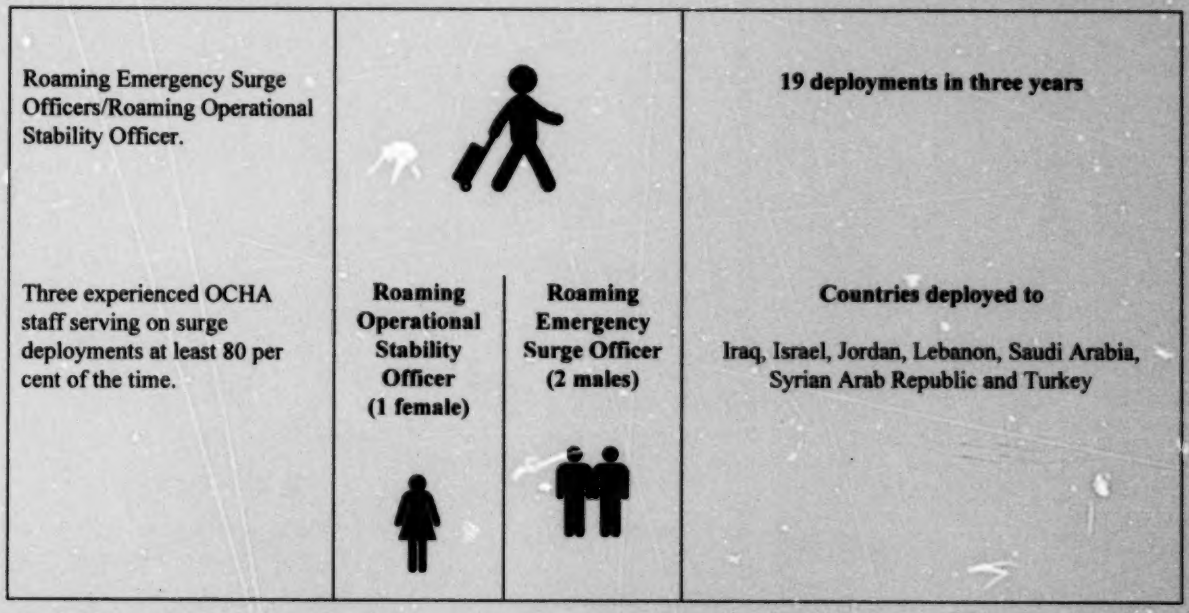
> OCHA should ensure that appropriately senior and technically competent leadership resources are available for prompt deployment to the field, and sustained during humanitarian crises, especially for major emergencies.

15. OCHA plays a central role in coordinating the humanitarian system, both at the country level and at the global level. This recommendation addressed the need for OCHA to establish a senior-level rapid deployment mechanism, so as to maximize the timeliness and effectiveness of its on-the-ground coordination role at the immediate onset of an emergency. A particular focus in this recommendation was the ability of OCHA to ensure that it had sufficient human resources that it could swiftly deploy to either an OCHA corporate emergency or a level 3 emergency, the highest-level emergency as defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.[4]

[4] Level 3 emergencies are emergencies in which the scale, complexity, urgency, response capacity and reputational risks are such that a significant corporate-level inter-agency response across the humanitarian system is warranted (see "Humanitarian system-wide emergency activation: definitions and procedures" (transformative agenda reference document PR/1204/4078/7)), Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 13 April 2012.

16. OCHA implemented this recommendation in 2013 through a series of initiatives, both within the programme itself and together with its inter-agency partners. First, it recruited three senior roaming officers — two Roaming Emergency Surge Officers at the P-5 level and one Roaming Operations Stability Officer at the P-4 level. These officers are deployed for up to three months at the immediate onset of an emergency to provide leadership and stability to OCHA operations. Roaming Emergency Surge Officers take the lead in physically establishing offices, while Roaming Operations Stability Officers provide general operational support to an OCHA office. It was originally envisaged that the officers' time would be divided, such that they would spend 80 per cent of their time in the field and 20 per cent at OCHA offices in Geneva or New York. When not deployed to the field, the officers would work with the Surge Staff Development Team to develop and deliver training and to support lesson-learning and other exercises to improve the OCHA emergency response. As shown in figure 1, senior roaming officers have been deployed frequently since their recruitment in 2013.[5]

Figure I
Deployment of senior roaming officers, 2013-2015


Roaming Emergency Surge Officers/Roaming Operational Stability Officer.
19 deployments in three years
Three experienced OCHA staff serving on surge deployments at least 80 per cent of the time.
Roaming Operational Stability Officer (1 female)
Roaming Emergency Surge Officer (2 males)
Countries deployed to
Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey

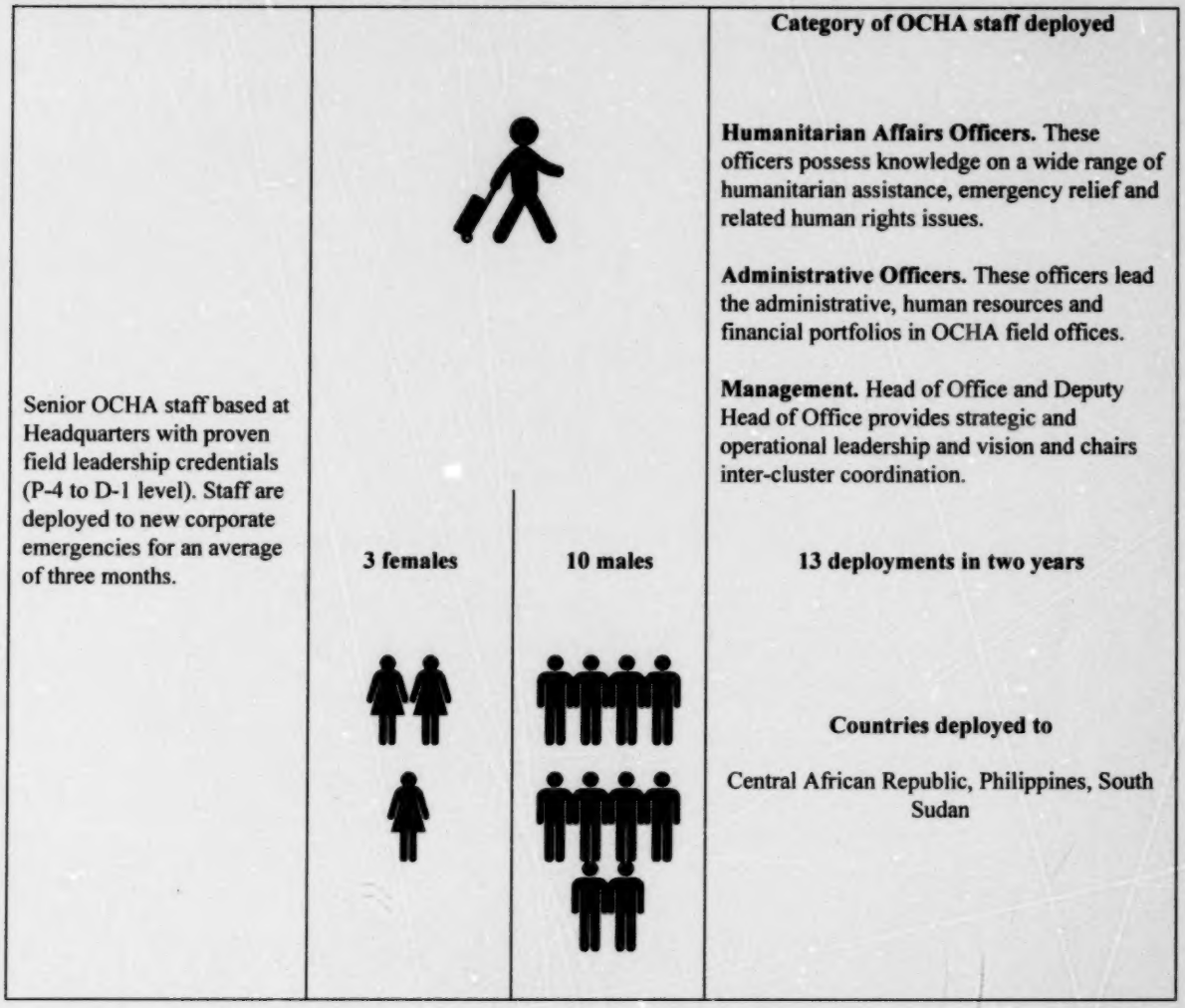
Source: OIOS compilation of OCHA data.

17. Another initiative OCHA undertook internally was the creation of the senior surge roster, which it introduced in July 2013. The roster focused on existing senior-level OCHA staff (P-4 to D-1) based at Headquarters who had proven field leadership credentials, along with key staff from regional offices who could

[5] The Roaming Emergency Surge Officers were recruited on 1 January and 1 March 2013; the Roaming Operational Stability Officer was recruited on 1 September 2013. Although the earliest of these recruitments predates the issuance of the OIOS final report, OCHA had the draft report in hand before the deployments.

temporarily leave their main OCHA post (i.e., for up to three months) and deploy to the field to address surge needs for level 3 or corporate emergencies. Data on senior surge roster deployments are provided in figure II.

Figure II
Senior surge roster deployments in 2013 and 2014


Category of OCHA staff deployed
Humanitarian Affairs Officers. These officers possess knowledge on a wide range of humanitarian assistance, emergency relief and related human rights issues.
Administrative Officers. These officers lead the administrative, human resources and financial portfolios in OCHA field offices.
Management. Head of Office and Deputy Head of Office provides strategic and operational leadership and vision and chairs inter-cluster coordination.
Senior OCHA staff based at Headquarters with proven field leadership credentials (P-4 to D-1 level). Staff are deployed to new corporate emergencies for an average of three months.
3 females
10 males
13 deployments in two years
Countries deployed to
Central African Republic, Philippines, South Sudan

Source: OIOS compilation of OCHA data.

18. According to OCHA, the use of the senior surge roster stopped in late 2014, when it was observed that the supply of qualified staff it could swiftly deploy to new or escalating emergencies had not kept pace with field needs. This shortage became particularly acute in 2013 and 2014, when numerous level 3 emergencies occurred simultaneously and the number of senior staff and the ratio of Headquarters-based staff to field-based staff had declined. There was therefore not enough Headquarters staff to draw upon during this time. Accordingly, OCHA

introduced a revised concept — optimizing surge mechanisms — to address those challenges and put forward a larger and more diverse surge pool including in its emergency response roster. The Senior Management Team is currently reviewing this concept. OCHA also noted other mechanisms it had strengthened to fulfil its surge capacity needs, namely, the associate surge pool and stand-by partnerships.[6]

19. In addition to these internal initiatives within OCHA, its response to the OIOS recommendation extended to the inter-agency level. On 10 December 2013, members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee addressed the need to ensure readily available human resources for rapid deployment for a level 3 emergency through the establishment of the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism. The Mechanism aims to ensure that agencies have the requisite standby capacity on hand, in keeping with their individual cluster lead agency roles and other coordination responsibilities, to enable them to deploy in a timely fashion. Deployments through the Mechanism serve to ensure a coordinated and coherent response to a system-wide activation in a level 3 emergency.

20. According to OCHA, its own internal mechanisms (i.e., the senior surge roster and the senior roaming officers) resulted in positive outcomes, facilitating faster deployment of senior staff with the technical skills to respond effectively to level 3 emergencies. The potential for longer-term impact was also seen as plausible, given that deployments were quick and sustained and that they provided the required level of leadership and technical competency.[7] In its evaluation, OIOS had noted that the short duration of deployments to large-scale, sudden-onset emergencies had hampered the ability of OCHA to be timely, effective and relevant. The deployment data after 2013 indicated that staff members had been deployed for long durations to the pressing emergency situations at the time; senior surge roster deployments averaged 70 days and senior roaming officers averaged 99 days.[8] Similarly, the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism was viewed as a beneficial mechanism that had provided a clear commitment and common understanding on surge deployment for level 3 emergencies. However, as the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism is an inter-agency modality, an assessment of deployments by Inter-Agency Standing Committee members fell outside the scope of the present review.

21. Recommendation 2 has been implemented. Looking ahead, OCHA should ensure that the optimizing surge mechanism concept is considered in a timely manner and that, subsequent to the deliberations of the Senior Management Team, it is finalized promptly.

[6] See http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/surge-capacity/resources.

[7] OIOS noted that the earliest deployments of Roaming Emergency Surge Officers predated the issuance of its final evaluation report. However, OCHA had the draft report of OIOS in hand before these deployments. In interviews for the present triennial review, key OCHA programme managers and staff clarified that, whereas the concept was not entirely new, the OIOS recommendation provided the impetus, as well as the financial means, to better institutionalize it.

[8] Calculations are based on deployment data maintained by OCHA for these two mechanisms.

Recommendation 3
Leading efforts to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the transformative agenda

22. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

> As part of the implementation of the transformative agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, OCHA should take a leadership role in developing a proposal to assess its effectiveness. This should include a periodic reporting system that can be utilized to track the accomplishment of the mutual accountability goal within the transformative agenda and may include an inter-agency evaluation of the effectiveness of the implementation of the transformative agenda.

23. This recommendation addressed the leadership role of OCHA in coordinating the assessment by the humanitarian system of its collective effectiveness in implementing the transformative agenda. Devised and implemented under the umbrella of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the transformative agenda aimed at strengthening three pillars of the humanitarian system: leadership, accountability and coordination. It represented the chief humanitarian reform initiative undertaken during the period covered by the OIOS evaluation.

24. OCHA implemented this recommendation through a series of tools for collecting data on the progress on the implementation of the transformative agenda, with the aim of facilitating stock-taking at both the collective humanitarian country team level and at the individual humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator level. At the humanitarian country team level, a framework for measuring success at the country level, which was endorsed by the Emergency Directors Group in June 2013, has been used. Using data provided by inter-agency transformative agenda focal points, this tool monitored implementation by the humanitarian country teams of the three pillars of the transformative agenda. It provided success benchmarks, key elements and objectively verifiable indicators for measurement. These provisions and indicators have also been integrated into the reporting formats for OCHA country offices.

25. At the humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator level, OCHA strengthened accountability frameworks to include performance compacts between the humanitarian coordinator and the Emergency Relief Coordinator. OCHA reported 84 per cent compliance in 2015 and 100 per cent compliance in 2014 in the signature of these compacts. The appraisal by the Emergency Relief Coordinator of the humanitarian coordinator, as well as input based on consultations with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (i.e., through the Emergency Directors Group) were channelled into the annual United Nations Development Group performance appraisals of resident coordinators. It was also reported that appraisals were used to identify underperformance, with ongoing operational support and guidance being provided through monthly telephone calls.

26. In addition to these tools, the response by OCHA to the OIOS recommendation has extended to the inter-agency level. It has primarily undertaken action on this level through the Emergency Directors Group, established in 2013, which OCHA chairs and to which it provides secretariat support. The Emergency Directors Group is comprised of Emergency Directors of Inter-Agency Standing Committee

members, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and observers.[9] The Group's purpose is to support humanitarian operations by advising the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals on operational issues of strategic concern and by mobilizing agency resources to address operational challenges and gaps, in support of the humanitarian coordinators and humanitarian country teams.

27. The Emergency Directors Group supports humanitarian operations and meets regularly in fulfilment of its responsibilities, one of which includes supporting and monitoring its membership's progress in implementing the transformative agenda and monitoring the development and roll-out of improved tools and services to help its members to implement the transformative agenda. Of particular note were the semi-annual meetings of the Emergency Directors Group with donors, which had a general thematic focus on transformative agenda implementation. As background to those meetings, the Group produced a paper on learning lessons in the implementation of the transformative agenda, coupled with an implementation tracking matrix. In preparation for the annual review of operations, "snapshots" of each country operation were produced, with a focus on key data points to highlight areas of progress, potential weaknesses and areas where individual parts of the system might not be adequately invested.

28. The Emergency Directors Group has also provided support in operational contexts through dedicated missions to both protracted situations, such as those in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and early warning challenges, such as that in the Central African Republic. Support was also provided remotely through videoconferences or telephone conferences to optimize the response in a number of countries to situations that had become increasingly complex.

29. The Emergency Directors Group also established the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team to support the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in implementing the transformative agenda at the country level. The Team seeks to improve the understanding and knowledge of the transformative agenda and its related tools and to strengthen tailor-made applications in specific humanitarian contexts. This role was undertaken through field missions, remote support and webinars. The Team provided a tool for monitoring the implementation of the transformative agenda and a mechanism for providing feedback to the Emergency Directors Group for action; however, the Team is itself a tool for direct support to strengthen progress in the field under the pillars of the transformative agenda.[10]

30. According to OCHA, its actions with respect to the OIOS recommendation have provided ongoing information on the progress of implementation of the transformative agenda, allowing for a better-informed assessment of such progress

[9] Under the terms of reference of the Emergency Directors Group, endorsed in March 2013, participation in the Group is limited to the Emergency Directors (D-1 or equivalent) of Inter-Agency Standing Committee members, plus one resource person. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are invited to nominate their Emergency Directors for participation as observers. The three NGO consortia (the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response and InterAction) nominate two operational NGOs from their membership, for ongoing participation in the Group.

[10] See https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/topics/transformative-agenda.

and, by extension, more strongly data-informed decision-making that has helped improve operational support and facilitate course correction. OIOS documented the tools and mechanisms to facilitate improved inter-agency decision-making, as well as a handful of examples in which the membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee used these tools for enhanced decision-making.[11] However, given time constraints and data availability, it was not possible to systematically catalogue evidence of widespread, systemic improvement. Nor was it possible, through documentary or perceptual evidence, to assign direct attribution to OCHA for any of the key areas of progress cited above.

31. OCHA chose not to undertake one optional action OIOS had suggested it consider under recommendation 3, namely the conduct of an inter-agency evaluation of the transformative agenda. OCHA declined to implement this aspect of the recommendation, claiming that the actions described above had adequately addressed the main thrust of the recommendation.

32. Recommendation 3 has been implemented. At the same time, with the World Humanitarian Summit scheduled for May 2016, OCHA should consider whether an evaluation of the implementation of the transformative agenda — or a similar stocktaking exercise — might still be in order. Given the wave of reform likely to ensue on the heels of the Summit, such an evaluation might serve to help the humanitarian system — and in particular OCHA, given its crucial system-wide coordination role — to critically reflect on and learn from the past, so as to chart a better-informed course in the future.

Recommendation 4
Strengthening performance reporting and evaluation of the emergency response funds, common humanitarian funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund

33. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

> OCHA should work with the humanitarian coordinators and/or resident coordinators and recipient organizations to further strengthen performance reporting and evaluation on the emergency response funds, common humanitarian funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund. This should include establishing, where not already present, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for each of the country-level pooled funds and working to ensure that OCHA and recipient organizations will dedicate sufficient resources for monitoring and evaluation. OCHA should further clarify the role and responsibilities of the managing agent in relation to monitoring and evaluation of the common humanitarian funds. Finally, specific indicators to monitor the performance of the emergency response funds, common humanitarian funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund should be included in the progress report developed in the context of transformative agenda reporting.

34. This recommendation addressed the aspect of the OCHA mandate related to its role in raising appeals and managing pooled humanitarian funds. The Central

[11] The Emergency Directors Group undertakes OCHA-supported reviews of progress achieved and lessons learned under the transformative agenda, on a biannual basis; Inter-Agency Standing Committee operational peer reviews; and inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, which, inter alia, assess the progress of the transformative agenda in response to level 3 emergencies. The Group also commissioned an external review, which synthesized numerous reviews of the transformative agenda.

Emergency Response Fund is a central funding mechanism managed by a secretariat based in New York. The emergency response funds and common humanitarian funds are pooled funds at the country level (termed "country-based pooled funds") under the overall management and oversight of the humanitarian coordinator, with significant day-to-day management by OCHA. UNDP serves as managing agent of four of the five common humanitarian funds.[12] In addition, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office of UNDP serves as administrative agent, managing contributions and channelling funds to United Nations agencies for all common humanitarian funds.[13]

35. These humanitarian financing vehicles are a vital means for funding humanitarian action. Donor contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund, emergency response funds and common humanitarian funds from 2013 to 2015 (i.e., the period since the OIOS evaluation) were as follows:

Donor contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund, emergency response funds and common humanitarian funds, 2013-2015

(United States dollars)

	2013	*2014*	*2015*
Central Emergency Response Fund[a]	478 765 462	479 853 687	402 650 491
Emergency response funds[b]	171 088 689	200 822 177	446 337 661
Common humanitarian funds[b]	342 067 818	525 144 397	339 224 291

Source: OIOS compilation of OCHA data (for common humanitarian funds and emergency response funds, see http://fts.unocha.org; for the Central Emergency Response Fund, see http://www.unocha.org/cerf/our-donors/funding/cerf-pledges-and-contributions-all).

[a] As at 9 March 2016.

[b] As at 16 February 2016.

36. The OIOS recommendation was aligned with other oversight recommendations issued prior to and since the OIOS evaluation.[14] To implement it, OCHA has undertaken numerous actions to strengthen performance reporting and evaluation of the funds. Most of these actions took place in 2015 for the country-based pooled funds and from 2013 to 2015 for the Central Emergency Response Fund.

37. OCHA developed an overarching framework for the country-based pooled funds, one that removed the distinction between emergency response funds and common humanitarian funds. It subsequently produced a policy instruction and an operational handbook for country-based pooled funds, issued in February 2015.[15] The policy instruction sets out the objectives, management and governance arrangements for all OCHA-managed country-based pooled funds; the operational handbook provides a coherent approach to the strategic and operational management of country-based pooled funds, with tools and processes that serve as minimum

[12] Common humanitarian funds are currently established for the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan.

[13] It also serves as the administrative agent of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

[14] See "Review of recurrent issues identified in recent internal audit engagements for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs" (Report 2015/095), Office of Internal Oversight Services, Internal Audit Division, 8 September 2015.

[15] In 2012 and 2013, OCHA used global monitoring and reporting frameworks for the emergency response funds and the common humanitarian funds.

standards. It provides details on a risk management approach, performance management, monitoring, reporting, evaluations, audits and compliance measures. According to OCHA, the managing agent function is addressed by the operational handbook, as it aims to ensure the most appropriate management arrangements without disrupting operations in the field, allowing for sufficient flexibility for UNDP to continue to provide management and administrative services for country-based pooled funds.

38. OCHA also completed the roll-out of the Grant Management System at the end of 2014. The Grant Management System is a web-based platform, the use of which is mandatory for the management of the entire grant life cycle for all country-based pooled funds. Implementing partners use this interface to submit project proposals and reports, and OCHA coordinates project review, monitoring and partner performance. The system also assists OCHA in implementing a risk-based management approach, as it provides monitoring and financial and narrative reporting. The system also includes a business intelligence module to facilitate reporting against performance indicators, in line with the transformative agenda.[16]

39. OCHA also developed a performance framework for country-based pooled funds in 2015 to help measure their performance on the three expected outcomes of country-based pooled funds outlined in the policy instruction, namely, improved effectiveness of humanitarian response through the direction of funds towards priority humanitarian needs; strengthened leadership of the humanitarian coordinator; and mobilization of resources and support to coordination in support of the humanitarian planning framework.

40. OCHA undertook numerous measures to strengthen monitoring and reporting with respect to the Central Emergency Response Fund. At the overarching level, the objectives of the transformative agenda were closely aligned with, and included in, the OCHA Strategic Framework 2014-2017. As a consequence, transformative agenda-related indicators for the Central Emergency Response Fund were included in its work plan and reported on annually. In addition, updates on the Fund were included in all reports of OCHA to the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General.

41. The Central Emergency Response Fund Performance and Accountability Framework, which was originally developed in 2009 as a means of formalizing a clear set of accountability and reporting processes, provides another level of monitoring and reporting. The Performance and Accountability Framework specifies three to five country-level reviews per year of the value added by the Fund. Since 2009, 29 countries have been assessed through 23 different reviews. In 2013, the Sahel region, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and Yemen were reviewed; in 2014, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar and the Sudan were reviewed; and in 2015 South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic were reviewed.[17] The Performance and Accountability Framework itself was also regularly revised and improved based on reviews and feedback. The most recent external review by OCHA of the Framework was finalized in 2013.[18] It identified

[16] See http://gms.unocha.org.

[17] See http://www.unocha.org/cerf/reportsevaluations/evaluations/country-reviews/performance-and-accountability-framework.

[18] See "Review of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Performance and Accountability Framework", prepared by Development and Humanitarian Learning in Action, September 2013.

11 recommendations for strengthening the Framework, all of which OCHA reported as implemented in 2015.

42. OCHA has also provided reporting formats and processes to the field to assist with monitoring and reporting. In 2013, OCHA developed a new reporting format and process for the Central Emergency Response Fund narratives, in order to increase accountability and timely reporting on results. It also rolled out field-based after action reviews as a standard component of the Central Emergency Response Fund reporting process, with the aim of promoting joint reflection on the Fund's performance and results, collective accountability for funds and the facilitation of lessons learning. It has introduced a requirement in the Fund's application template that applicants clearly explain their field-level monitoring and information-sharing plans. A standard tool has also been introduced for recipient agencies to provide interim project status updates to the humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator, humanitarian country teams and OCHA country offices.

43. OCHA has also provided standard messaging in the formal allocation communication from the Emergency Relief Coordinator, explaining to recipient agencies their Central Emergency Response Fund-related responsibilities for sharing information with the humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator. It has also developed draft guidance outlining the roles and responsibilities of key actors in relation to Central Emergency Response Fund monitoring and information-sharing at the field level. This guidance was slated for finalization by March 2016.

44. Lastly, both the country-based pooled funds[19] and the Central Emergency Response Fund[20] have been evaluated since the OIOS made its recommendation. References to both funds have also been recently included in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee humanitarian response monitoring guidance for 2016.[21]

45. As OCHA issued the policy instruction and the operational handbook for country-based pooled funds in February 2015, at the time of the triennial review, it was too early to detect outcome level changes resulting from these initiatives. Initial feedback was positive, however, both at Headquarters and in the field. The policy instruction and the operational handbook were seen as providing much-needed consistency in the guidance and tools for the country-based pooled funds and as setting out minimum standards for monitoring, performance reporting and evaluation. The Grant Management System was likewise viewed as a positive tool for streamlining fund management and enhancing accessibility of information; however, further training and refinement were needed. The actions by OCHA to strengthen the Central Emergency Response Fund, meanwhile, were viewed as providing refinement to guidance and measures already in place, with initial positive feedback that it helped improve monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

46. Recommendation 4 has been implemented. There are early signs pointing to the positive effects of actions by OCHA. However, given the high level of financial, programmatic and reputational risk these funds embody — in highly insecure environments and frequently with access restrictions — it is crucial that OCHA

[19] See "Evaluation of the common humanitarian fund: global synthesis report", OCHA, May 2015; and "The global evaluation of the emergency response funds: final report", OCHA, March 2013.

[20] See http://www.unocha.org/cerf/reportsevaluations/evaluations/country-reviews/performance-and-accountability-framework.

[21] Available from https://humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/humanitarian-response-monitoring-guidance.

continue to ensure proper use of the new initiatives, as well as training and support to users and continually monitor and trouble-shoot problems. Owing to this same risk consideration, the OIOS Internal Audit Division will continue to review monitoring and reporting issues,[14] and OCHA will continue to work with the OIOS Investigations Division in a collaborative manner to identify any areas of high risk that are suitable for proactive investigation.

Recommendation 5
Improving modalities for undertaking joint inter-agency evaluations

47. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

> Within the context of the work being done as part of the transformative agenda, OCHA should work closely with partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to revisit and improve the modalities being used to perform joint inter-agency evaluations.

48. This recommendation addressed the OCHA evaluation function in its role as Chair of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group. This role positions OCHA as a central fixture of learning and accountability within the humanitarian system. As the Chair of the Steering Group, its roles and responsibilities include advising the Emergency Relief Coordinator and members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the strategic use of evaluations to promote the accountability of the humanitarian system, promoting evidence-based policy development and providing support to the reform of the international humanitarian system.

49. Inter-agency evaluations have taken various forms and approaches over time. At the time of the OIOS evaluation, inter-agency real-time evaluations were one of the main inter-agency evaluation modalities of humanitarian action, providing humanitarian country teams and the wider humanitarian system with early assessments of the on-the-ground response during the first three months of an emergency. This recommendation sought to address concerns that joint inter-agency evaluations,[22] and inter-agency real-time evaluations, in particular, yielded low benefits relative to their financial and human resource costs (see E/AC.51/2013/3, para. 46).

50. In response to the recommendation, OCHA, in consultation with its Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group partners, introduced a new modality for inter-agency evaluation, the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of large-scale system-wide emergencies. Framed as a key component of the humanitarian programme cycle, inter-agency humanitarian evaluation s are full-fledged evaluations, conducted within 9 to 12 months of the initial emergency response and repositioned to focus more pointedly on outcome assessment. Inter-agency humanitarian evaluations are mandatory for all system-wide level 3 emergencies, and can be considered in other cases at the specific request of a humanitarian coordinator or humanitarian country team. As such, inter-agency

[22] In addition to inter-agency real-time evaluations, thematic evaluations of global funds and policy initiatives, such as those of the Central Emergency Response Fund, the common humanitarian funds and the cluster approach, had also been undertaken (see "5-year evaluation of the Central Emergency Response Fund: synthesis report: final draft", OCHA, 25 July 2011; "Evaluation of the common humanitarian fund: synthesis report", OCHA, 21 March 2011; and Cluster approach evaluation 2: synthesis report, OCHA, April 2010).

humanitarian evaluations were intended to strengthen the transformative agenda pillar of inter-agency accountability in humanitarian action.

51. The inter-agency humanitarian evaluation modality was discussed and agreed by all Inter-Agency Standing Committee members in 2013, and the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group subsequently developed the guidelines for the inter-agency humanitarian evaluations of large-scale system-wide emergencies, which were finalized in April 2014. The guidelines provide a set of operating procedures for inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, including triggers, timelines and procedures, methodological approaches, governance and management arrangements. The guidelines were piloted for the evaluation of the response to Typhoon Haiyan (2014), and subsequently used for the responses in South Sudan (2014) and the Central African Republic (2015). They are also being used for the evaluation of the response in Iraq in 2016.

52. Concurrent with the development of the guidelines, OCHA, in its role as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group, reported attempts to improve its policy and strategic support surrounding inter-agency evaluations (inter-agency humanitarian evaluations and other types of evaluation). In this role, OCHA strengthened its coordination of its inter-agency evaluation partners. It also took steps to better highlight the role of evaluation, both real and potential, to Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals and the Emergency Directors Group, with a view to promoting strategic use of evaluations for accountability, policy development and support to humanitarian reform.

53. According to OCHA and its evaluation partners, the renewed focus on evaluation within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the new modality for inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of large-scale humanitarian emergencies, attest to the improvements that have been made in inter-agency evaluation. In addition to instilling a greater focus on outcomes, inter-agency humanitarian evaluations offered greater predictability by providing a mechanism for triggering and conducting such outcome-focused evaluation in all level 3 emergencies. The time frame for the present triennial review did not afford a systematic appraisal of the quality, credibility and utility of the inter-agency humanitarian evaluations conducted to date. According to those within OCHA and its Inter-Agency Standing Committee partners in the Steering Group, however, OCHA efforts have helped strengthen accountability as well as learning.

54. Notwithstanding these reported improvements, evaluation partners acknowledged two ongoing challenges. First, inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, while viewed as an improvement over inter-agency real-time evaluations, were also viewed as providing insufficient information on results achieved and on the respective contributions and accountabilities of individual Inter-Agency Standing Committee members. In addition, data gaps as well as scoping issues (e.g., pre-assessment of accessibility issues related to key areas and stakeholders) were seen as continuing challenges. OCHA has sought feedback from members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and from the evaluation teams after each inter-agency humanitarian evaluation. Based on this feedback, a revision of the aforementioned guidelines is planned in 2016. Secondly, while its partners in the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group appreciated the efforts of OCHA as Chair of the Steering Group, as well as the challenges faced by the evaluation function within OCHA, there was general concern that the function

remained underresourced, and that it still lacked sufficient independence (in accordance with the United Nations Evaluations Group norms and standards) to fulfil its accountability and learning role, its inward self-evaluation and its inter-agency humanitarian evaluation coordination role effectively.

55. Recommendation 5 has been implemented. However, OCHA should continue to improve in its fulfilment of its critical evaluation role, both internally and in its capacity as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group. The revision of the inter-agency humanitarian evaluation guidelines should proceed as planned. OCHA has taken steps to strengthen its evaluation function; as a matter of priority, it should continue to enhance the capacity and independence of its evaluation function. Echoing OCHA partners' concerns, OIOS has raised this issue repeatedly, not only in its 2013 evaluation, but also in a 2012 monitoring and evaluation of OCHA,[23] as well as in successive evaluation scorecard reports.[24] As these various sources have collectively underlined, the high level of financial, reputational and programmatic risk inherent in the humanitarian system necessitates strong leadership, sufficient independence and adequate resourcing of the programme's evaluation function.

III. Conclusion

56. The mandate of OCHA is to ensure the timely, coherent, coordinated and principled response of the international community to disasters and emergencies and to facilitate the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and sustainable development. OCHA has implemented all of the OIOS recommendations, and indicative evidence points to outcome-level results. The steps taken by OCHA to implement the recommendations have had some immediate positive outcomes, with many on the path to longer-term impact. To further increase its effectiveness, OCHA should continue to implement the recommended actions and refine them as necessary to the changing context within which it operates.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
23 March 2016

[23] "Inspection of programme-level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs"(IED-12-001, OIOS-IED), Office of Internal Oversight Services, 2012.

[24] The scorecard report rated a sample of OCHA evaluations to be of generally good quality, but noted that the strengthening of the independence of its evaluation function was "in progress," and information on its resources was "not available" (see "United Nations Secretariat Evaluation Scorecards 2012-2013" (assignment No. IED-15-009), Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division, 17 November 2015.

Annex*

Comments received from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Thank you for sharing the final draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the triennial review of the implementation of recommendations on the programme evaluation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and for seeking formal comments from my office.

We appreciate the opportunity to have been able to provide comments to an earlier informal draft of the report. At this stage, OCHA would like to provide the following formal comments on recommendation 3 of the report.

OCHA, in its dual role as an organization implementing the transformative agenda and coordinating the implementation of the agenda on behalf of the humanitarian community, has consistently lent support to multiple inter-agency reviews of the transformative agenda through various channels.

These activities have been regular and thorough, while striving to remain relevant and supportive to ongoing humanitarian operations. Reviews have ranged during this period from regular lessons-learned analysis and action point tracking on key strategic operational issues, to joint inter-agency field missions and regular humanitarian leadership support activities. Leadership in inter-agency reviews is also exercised through the overseeing of coordination of inter-agency operational peer reviews of level 3 responses and direct field support through the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team, which acts under the aegis of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group, as chaired by the Director of the OCHA Coordination and Response Division, in a dual-hatted role. Focus is maintained in the design of these reviews on integrating gender considerations and balance, on supporting field colleagues with practical, resource-efficient solutions and on maintaining a consistent balance of NGO and United Nations representation.

The broader humanitarian and donor community has commended the Emergency Directors and OCHA for this active operational leadership in the implementation of the transformative agenda and supported the open, frank, field-first learning approach taken by the Emergency Directors to track progress and identify areas requiring collection attention to support humanitarian operations, under the leadership of the Chair. This should be noted in the context of the review with respect to recommendation 3.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for the good cooperation in conducting the review.

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* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services presents the full text of comments of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.